БЕЛАРУСКАЯ АСАЦЫЯЦЫЯ ЖУРНАЛІСТАЎ

THE BELARUSIAN ASSOCIATION OF JOURNALISTS

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MASS MEDIA IN BELARUS

E-NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER – DECEMBER 2013



Фото: Сергей Балай

The period is characterized by a more active persecution of internet-commentators and bloggers. These are still single cases, but it's evident that the authorities are paying more attention to the Internet… It can be easily predicted that the closer the president elections campaign, the stricter repression against social and political media we'll observe…

Aliaksandr Starykevich,
Vice-chairman, BAJ

Some amendments should be introduced to the Law on mass media, according to which the most popular and influential internet-resources will fall into the category of mass media and will be responsible for dissemination of any information – up to the registration revocation.

Dzmitry Shadko,
Deputy Minister of Information of Belarus



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MAIN EVENTS IN MASS MEDIA FIELD IN OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2013

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- **Court supports the decision of the Ministry of Information on the "Lohvinau" editing house license deprivation.**
- **Criminal cases for online publications.**
- **The Ministry of Information seeks to spread its control over Web-resources.**

DETENTIONS OF JOURNALISTS

In the morning of October 19th, ten journalists were detained on a platform of the Central railway station in Minsk. They were going to shed lights on the return of Pavel Sieviaryniets, the prisoner of conscience, who had been liberated the day before. The police released the journalists only after Pavel Sieviaryniets left the railway station.


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On October 23rd, the incident, alongside with other similar events, was discussed at the meeting of Belarusian Association of Journalists leaders with the head of the Department of Internal Affairs at Minsk City Executive Committee Aliaksandr Barsukou. Nevertheless, the situation hasn't improved so far.

On October 29th, five journalists who were present at the ceremony of laying flowers by public activists at Kalvaryja cemetery were detained. The ceremony was to commemorate the Remembrance Day of victims of political repression. The media representatives were taken to the Frunzienski District Police Department

in Minsk. Following the checks of IDs and personal belongings, they were released in an hour and a half.

Two more journalists were detained on that very day. TV journalists Aliaksandr Barazienka and Maria Artsybashava were detained in the street while conducting a street video-survey on youth organizations in Belarus. They were brought to the police department of Leninski district in Minsk, after that – to the prosecutor's office, and then to the police station again. The journalists were released in three hours.


photo.bymedia.net

On November 6th, the police detained a freelance journalist Anastasia Reznikava and members of the Belarusian Association of Journalists Vyachaslau Pieshka, who had a press card of "Novy Chas" newspaper correspondent with him) and a film director Volha Mikalaychuk.

The detention of journalists took place near the Pre-trial Detention Center in Akrestin Street, They were going to cover the release of an activist from Gomel Yuri Rubtsou after three days of arrest. Mr Rubtsou had been taken into custody during the authorized "Dziady" rally in Minsk. The activist was prosecuted for refusing to take off a T-shirt with a slogan "Lukashenko, go away!"

The journalists were taken to the Department of Internal Affairs of Maskouski district in Minsk, their IDs were checked and personal belongings inspected. The police officers erased the video recordings with Rubtsou's release from custody and then returned the cassette and the video camera to the correspondents.

Thus, 20 journalists were detained by the police during the last quarter of 2013. According to BAJ, 45 detentions of journalists at work took place in 2013. 4 cases resulted in administrative arrests, lasting from 3 to 15 days.

THE SUPREME ECONOMIC COURT SUPPORTS THE DECISION OF THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION ON STRIPPING THE "LOHVINAU" EDITING HOUSE OF ITS LICENSE

The Supreme Economic Court of the Republic of Belarus refused to satisfy the appeal of the "Lohvinau" editing house owner, who had requested the Ministry of Information of Belarus to cancel its decision to strip him of his business license.



On November 18th, the judge of the Supreme Economic Court Tatsiana Pratashchyk announced the court verdict in support of the ministerial ruling. Ihar Lohvinau appealed against the verdict to the Board of Appeals at the Supreme Economic Court of Belarus.

One of the most influential independent editing houses in Belarus was deprived of its license for publishing the "Press Photo Belarus 2011" photo album, found by the Ashmiany District Court to be an extremist material. The case had been filed by the KGB Department for Hrodna region.

CRIMINAL CASES FOR ONLINE PUBLICATIONS

In the evening of November 20th, the Investigation Committee officers searched the apartment, belonging to Dzianis Dashkievich, the Editor-in-chief of vrogacheve.ru Web-portal (Rahachou, Homiel region) and seized two computers and a modem from him.



Mr. Dashkievich was informed that the inspection was conducted within the scope of a criminal case on charges relating to insulting a representative of local authorities. The criminal proceedings were initiated, basing on the statement, delivered by the Deputy Chairman of Rahachou District Executive Committee Mr. Karalchuk, vrogacheve.ru reported.

On November 29th, a journalist of one of Belarusian news agencies (the title is unknown) paid out moral

damages in the amount of 20 million Belarusian rubles (approximately EUR 1,500) for insulting a judge in the Internet. The Web-site of "Komsomolskaya Pravda in Belarus" (www.kp.by) newspaper reported on the incident. Reportedly, the journalist left an indecent comment to an article about a court decision. The comment was used as a pre-text for starting criminal proceedings on art.391 of the Belarus' Criminal Code "Insulting a judge or a lay judge".

THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION SEEKS TO SPREAD ITS CONTROL OVER WEB-RESOURCES.

At the end of November 2013, Deputy Minister of Information Dzmitry Shadko claimed (according to the state-owned BelTA News Agency), that "some amendments should be introduced to the Law 'On Mass Media', according to which the most popular and influential Web-resources would fall into the category of mass media and would be responsible for dissemination of any information". A special group of representatives from the departments concerned was created to meet the goal.

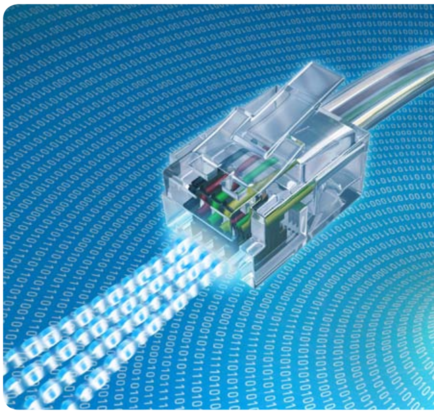
The Belarusian "Mass Media Law" does not define the term of "On-line Mass Media", but delegates the authority for their registration and activity regulation to the Government of the Republic of Belarus. Nevertheless, the corresponding resolution has never been adopted so far. The extension of repressive Belarusian mass media legislation over the Internet resources will considerably complicate, and in some cases make impossible their activity and increase the possibilities for the Ministry of Information of Belarus to impose sanctions, up to their closure.



RATING LISTS, INDEXES, REPORTS

THE FREEDOM HOUSE HAS RATED BELARUS AMONG THE COUNTRIES WITH NON-FREE INTERNET.

The Freedom House report on Internet freedom in 2013 includes 60 countries. 29 of them blocked or filtered information of political and social nature in the Internet.



Belarus was mentioned as the only country in Europe where the Internet freedom was limited. The situation in the country, according to the human rights watchdogs from the Freedom House, could be compared with China, Sudan, and Ethiopia.

BELARUS HOLDS THE LAST PLACE IN EASTERN PARTNERSHIP MEDIA FREEDOM INDEX

Belarus is still falling behind in the second Media Freedom Index of the Eastern Partnership (EaP) states. The Index was drafted on the eve of the Vilnius summit on November 28-29th. Just as during the preliminary expert survey, held in the summer of 2013, Belarus showed the worst results in all four blocks of issues - 'Politics', 'Application practice', 'Broadcasting', and 'Internet and New Media'.

The research is held within the ENP EaP Media Freedom Watch project. The overall index is prepared through interviewing 10 media experts in each of six Eastern Partnership countries: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. The index determines the degree of compliance of regional journalists' rights with fundamental rights and freedoms.

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